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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000598

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ISTANBUL CONFERENCE SHOWCASES INCREASED POLICE
SERIOUSNESS ON TRAFFICKING

1. (U) Summary: Police chiefs and high-level officers from throughout Turkey participated in a three-day workshop in Istanbul from April 12-14 on combating trafficking in persons. In Turkey,s case, most victims are women lured from eastern European countries by the promise of work, and then forced into sexual slavery. Presentations by Europol, Scotland Yard, and other law enforcement shared best practices with the officers. The workshop, organized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) with sponsorship from the Swedish Consulate in Istanbul, showcased Turkey,s seriousness in tackling this growing crime-- 550 victims were identified in the last two years. Though Turkish police officers still need additional training and resources to deal with trafficking, the Europol representative told us that Turkey has made a quantum leap, in the last two years. End Summary.

Turkish National Legislation and Prosecution

2. (U) Faruk Kurtoglu, Istanbul prosecutor and Ministry of Justice representative, began the program by outlining changes in Turkish law that have been made to combat trafficking. For example, a crime was previously defined as a violation of the law; after reforms in 2005, unfair, acts are also criminalized: Article 80 of the Turkish penal code now categorizes exploitation, threats, coercion or forced labor as punishable. This is a direct response to the growing human trafficking problem. He also cited the 2003 legal reform, whereby a foreigner must be married to a Turk for three years before qualifying for a Turkish passport as another measure that will help combat trafficking by making it more difficult to smuggle people into the country.

Prosecution Rates Low

3. (SBU) Prosecution of this crime, however, remains low, as prosecutors and judges are not yet aware of the 2005 legislative reforms. Participants predicted that planned training in the coming months should increase this awareness and thereby also increase prosecution rates. Traffickers are suspected to be Turks acting with Eastern European accomplices. A recent trend of concern is that traffickers are increasingly women who had themselves been trafficked. Two policemen are currently on trial for trafficking in persons, but it is not clear to what degree corrupt officials are part of the problem.

International Best Practices

4. (U) Steve Harvey, head of Europol,s trafficking persons department, provided technical training throughout the workshop. He explained the EU,s approach to treating victims of trafficking and prosecuting traffickers. The Europol framework places women,s welfare above prosecuting criminals at any cost, arguing that the state should not take action unless victims desire it. Above all, he expressed the need to treat victims humanely given that this crime by its very nature violates human rights. In discussing how to treat a victim, Harvey told the group to "speak to her as you would want someone to speak to your wife or daughter."

5. (U) The leader of a six-member Swedish Parliamentary delegation echoed this humanist approach. In Sweden, trafficking in persons and prostitution are on the decline following a concerted effort to heighten penalties. Traffickers therefore no longer find Sweden an easy environment, and have chosen to move elsewhere. The Member of Parliament contrasted this approach with that of Germany and the Netherlands, where legalized prostitution has produced concomitant increase in prostitution's incidence. She called for greater sanctions against traffickers, which produced a discussion by the audience of the merits of the Swedish approach.

Audience Participation

16. (SBU) The vast majority of 35 police participants were attentive and focused throughout the workshop, asking practical questions about how they could better handle the situations they face on a day-to-day basis. In one instance, a participant suggested that outlawing prostitution simply pushed it underground, making it more dangerous for health and safety, and harder to combat. Another suggested that Turkey is more of a transit country and not as much of a destination country for trafficking in persons as other countries in the region-- according to this view, Turkey is therefore already devoting sufficient resources to combating this type of crime, and other issues should have a higher priority.

17. (SBU) Participants also questioned a Ministry of Foreign Affairs presenter about whether the MFA was in fact taking steps to help the police force face this challenge. They felt that the MFA expected them to fight this crime but did not help cover the costs of shelters, medical exams, etc. to properly assist rescued women. The MFA representative responded that the GOT had sent a letter to public hospitals stating hospitals must provide medical examinations for free, and assured the audience she would report back to her superiors that there was a glitch in the implementation.

Comment

18. (SBU) The high-level attendance-- both in terms of number of participants and expertise of speakers-- showcases the Government of Turkey's recognition of the seriousness of the problem and the need to address it effectively. Police chiefs and officers in the room were attentive and serious, conveying a professionalism and commitment. While welcoming input on how Europe addresses the problem, they were also willing to voice their own concerns, experience, and challenges. Such a free exchange of points of view can only strengthen Turkish officials, ability to combat trafficking and assist its victims. Of course, the proof of the pudding will be GOT seriousness when it comes to prosecuting actual cases. End Comment.
JONES